

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-15

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R 131615Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2636
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO J2 QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LA PAZ 7452

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, BL
SUBJECT: PERSPECTIVES ON THE JULY 9 ELECTIONS

1. SUMMARY. BOLIVIA'S JULY 9 ELECTIONS WERE A POLITICAL WATERSHED. ALTHOUGH FATALLY FLAWED, THEY DEMONSTRATED CLEARLY THAT A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF CITIZENS, WEARY OF MILITARY RULE, HAD STRONG RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE RECORD OF THE BANZER YEARS. THE PEASANTS, WHO COMPRISE ABOUT HALF THE VOTING POPULATION, DISPLAYED A NEW POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS; IN MANY INSTANCES, THEY REJECTED GOVERNMENT COERCION AND CAST THEIR BALLOTS FOR HERNAN SILES, RENE BERNAL OR OR VICTOR PAZ. SILES' UDP AND THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, WHO SUPPORTED THE BERNAL CANDIDACY, EMERGED STRENGTHENED FROM THE ELECTORAL EXPERIENCE. PAZ DID RELATIVELY POORLY, BUT, LIKE BANZER, HAS BEEN POLICIAALLY REVIVED BY THE ANNULMENT AND PRO-PEREDA COUP. ALTHOUGH THE FAILED ELECTIONS WERE A SEVERE SETBACK TO THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS, THEY OPENED THE WAY FOR REFORMS WHICH COULD HELP PRODUCE A TRULY REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT WITHIN TWO YEARS.

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END SUMMARY.

2. THE JULY ELECTIONS, SESPITE THEIR MANIFOLD DEFECTS, LAID BARE NEW POLITICAL REALITIES AND DESTROYED SOME HAL-LOWED MYTHS. AS THE GOVERNMENT OF JUAN PEREDA PREPARES TO SET THE GUIDELINES FOR THE NEXT ELECTORAL ROUND, WE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO HIGHLIGHT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT

CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE.

3. THE ARMED FORCES. IN A REAL SENSE, THE ARMED FORCES WERE THE BIGGEST LOSERS ON JULY 9. GOING INTO THE ELECTIONS, THEY HAD REASON TO BE PROUD OF THE POLITICAL STABILITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH BOLIVIA ENJOYED DURING THE BANZER YEARS. INASMUCH AS PEREDA, ABOVE ALL, REPRESENTED A CONTINUATION OF THEIR SCHEME OF GOVERNMENT, THEY EXPECTED HIM TO WIN A HEFTY PORTION OF THE POPULAR VOTE. THEY SHARED WITH MOST OBSERVERS THE VIEW THAT A VOTE FOR PEREDA REPRESENTED AN ENDORSEMENT OF THE ARMED FORCES. THEY WERE STUNG, THEREFORE, BY PEREDA'S DISAPPOINTING SHOWING. THEY WERE FURTHER EMBARRASSED BY THE WIDESPREAD ALLEGATIONS, MANY OF WHICH WERE WELL FOUNDED, OF MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN PRO-PEREDA COERCION AND VOTE FRAUD. THEY LEARNED THE HARD WAY THAT THE MILITARY-PEASANT PACT, THE POLITICAL INSTRUMENT THAT HAD KEPT THE RURAL SECTOR IN LINE SINCE THE BARRIENTOS PRESIDENCY, HAD RUN ITS COURSE. WHILE THE PACT REMAINS IN OPERATION, MOST OBSERVERS AGREE THAT IT IS MORIBUND, IF NOT ACTUALLY DEAD. AS AN INSTITUTION, THE ARMED FORCES HAVE LOST FACE, SELF-CONFIDENCE, AND, TO SOME EXTENT, A SENSE OF PURPOSE. THEY ARE NOW INVOLVED IN INTERNAL WRANGLINGS ABOUT WHAT TO DO NEXT--REMAIN IN GOVERNMENT UNTIL MID-1980 OR BEAT A HASTIER RETREAT TO THE BARRACKS.

4. THE RURAL SECTION. THE PEASANTS (CAMPESES) COMPRISE ABOUT
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50 PERCENT OF BOLIVIA'S VOTING POPULATION. BEFORE JULY 9, THE COMMON WISDOM HELD THAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD MANIPULATE OR FALSIFY THEIR VOTE WITH IMPUNITY. THE PEASANTS WOULD NOT COMPLAIN, AND THE REST OF BOLIVIA--AND THE WORLD--WOULD NOT CARE. THE PEASANT VOTE WAS DISPARAGINGLY CALLED "BLACK" OR "NULL," AND WAS SEEN AS THE GOVERNMENT SLATE'S GUARANTEE OF VICTORY. THESE LAST ELECTIONS, HOWEVER, PROVED DIFFERENT FROM THOSE IN THE RECENT PAST. IN THE RURAL AREAS OF LA PAZ, POTOSI AND CHUQUISACA, THERE WAS A HEAVY TURNOUT FOR SLIES; IN COCHABAMBA AND ORURO, THE PEASANTS CAME OUT STRONGLY FOR BERNAL; AND IN TARIJA AND SANTA CRUZ, THEY VOTED IN LARGE NUMBERS FOR PAZ. GOVERNMENT COERCION, THROUGH MUNICIPAL OR AGRARIAN SYNDICATE LEADERS OR THROUGH THE COORDINATORS OF THE MILITARY-PEASANT PACT, PROVED ONLY PARTIALLY EFFECTIVE, AND LEFT A RESIDUE OF BITTERNESS AND RESENTMENT. A SIGNIFICANT LESSON OF JULY 9 IS THAT THE PEASANTS, PARTICULARLY IN THE AREAS NEAR THE MAJOR CITIES, HAVE BECOME POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS. IN FUTURE ELECTIONS THEY WILL BE MORE APT TO VOTE THEIR INTERESTS--WHICH WILL NOT NECESSARILY COINCIDE WITH THOSE OF THE GOVERNMENT.

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5. POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL PARTIES. IN RELATIVE POLITICAL TERMS, THE BIG WINNER IN THE JULY ELECTIONS WAS HERNAN SILES, WHO GARNERED INDISPUTABLE PLURALITIES IN THE CITY OF LA PAZ AND THE DEPARTMENT OF CHUQUISACA. SILES' CAMPAIGN WAS WELL-FINANCED AND WELL-ORGANIZED; HE GENERATED ENTHUSIASM AND BROUGHT OUT THE VOTE. ON THE OTHER HADNDD, PERHAPS AS MANY AS HALF OF THE BALLOTS FOR SILES WERE ACTUALLY CAST AGAINST PEREDA AND THE MILITARY'S SCHEME OF GOVERNMENT. THEREFORE, DESPITE HIS STRONG SHOWING, SILES STILL MAY NOT BE "PRESIDENCIABLE." BUT HE REMAINS AT THIS POINT THE STRONGEST OPPOSITION FIGURE, AND HIS UDP COALITION HAS EMERGED AS THE MOST IMPRESSIVE ELECTORAL VEHICLE. ANOTHER WINNER WAS RENE BERNAL, WHO RECEIVED ENEXPECTEDLY HEAVY REGIONAL SUPPORT, PARTICULARLY IN HIS NATIVE ORRO. BERNAL'S IMPRESSIVE SHOWING STRENGTHENED THE RELATIVELY SMALL CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDC), WHICH SPONSORED HIS CANDIDACY ALL ALONE. HE IS NOT REGARDED AS PRESIDENTIAL-TIMBER, HOWEVER, AND WHETHER HE WILL SURFACE AS A CANDIDATE IN THE FUTURE IS CONJECTURABLE. RECENTLY, BERNAL SURPRISED MANY OBSERVERS BY SUDDENLY WITHDRAWING FROM THE PDC TO DEVOTE ALL HIS ENERGIES TO ORGAINING THE

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PEASANT SECTOR. THERE ARE REPORTS THAT HE MAY HAVE MADE A

SEPARATE PEACE WITH PEREDA, AND IS NOW WORKING WITH THE
BARRIENTISTA SEGMENT OF THE UNP COALITION.

6. MNR-PRA CANDIDATE VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO SHOWED RELATIVELY
POORLY ON JULY 9. HIS PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN STARTED PROMISINGLY,
BUT QUICKLY PETERED OUT. IF THE ELECTIONS HAD NOT BEEN ANNULLED,
MANY BELIEVE PAZ WOULD HAVE BEEN FINISHED AS A SIGNIFICANT
POLITICAL FACTOR; HIS DEMISE MIGHT ALSO HAVE SIGNALED THE
END OF THE MNR AS AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL FORCE. WITH THE
ANNULMENT, HOWEVER, PAZ EXPERIENCED A POLITICAL REVIVAL, AND, IN
THE ABSENCE OF AN "OFFICIAL" CANDIDATE, HE COULD WELL BE THE
KEY FIGURE IN A FUTURE STRUGGLE FOR THE POLITICAL CENTER.
ANOTHER LOSER IN THE ELECTIONS WAS THEN-PRESIDENT HUGO
BANZER, WHOSE RECORD OF GOVERNMENT WAS REJECTED BY OVER HALF
OF BOLIVIA'S VOTERS. LIKE PAZ, THOUGH, BANZER WAS SOMEWHAT
REFLOATED BY THE ANNULMENT AND SUBSEQUENT COUP. AS BANZER
IS NO LONGER POLITICALLY IDENTIFIED WITH PEREDA, IT IS POSSIBLE
THAT HE WILL BE ABLE TO DISSOCIATE HIMSELF FROM RESPONSIBILITY
FOR BOLIVIA'S LOOMING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. IF HE WERE TO RUN
FOR THE PRESIDENCY IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS, HE WOULD CERTAINLY
TRY TO INVOKE THE STABILITY AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY OF HIS
NEARLY-SEVERN YEARS IN OFFICE.

7. THE BALANCE SHEET. THE MASSIVE FRAUD WHICH CHARACTERIZED
THE JULY 9 ELECTIONS PROVED ACUTELY EMBARRASSING TO BOLIVIA,
BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY. TRAUMATIC AS THE
ELECTORAL EXPERIENCE WAS, HOWEVER, IT PRODUCED POSITIVE AS WELL
AS NEGATIVE EFFECTS. ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE:
--DEMOCRATIC RULE HAS BEEN POSTPONED FORRUP TO TWO YEARS.
--THE PEREDA GOVERNMENT, LACKING A POLITICAL MANDATE, MAY NOT
FEEL SUFFICIENTLY SECURE TO TAKE THE MEASURES NECESSARY
TO SHORE UP BOLIVIA'S SAGGING ECONOMY.
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--THE ARMED FORCES, WHILE THEY CONTINUE IN THE GOVERNMENT,
FACE FURTHER INTERNAL DISCORD AND INSTITUTIONAL ATROPHY.

8. ON THE POSITIVE SIDE:
-- THE WIDESPREAD FRAUD MADE ELECTORAL LAW REFORM INEVITABLE.
WE CAN NOW EXPECT THE RESTORATION OF A UNIFORM, MULTI-
PARTY BALLOT , A REVISED SYSTEM OF VOTER REGISTRATION, AND A RETURN
TO PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN THE CONGRESS.
--AS A RESULT OF BITTER CRITICISM, PEREDA HAS PLEDGED THAT
THERE WILL BE NO "OFFICIAL" CANDIDATE IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS.
IF HE KEEPS HIS WORD, THE CHANCES OF A TRULY REPRESENTATIVE
GOVERNMENT EMERGING WILL BE SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVED.
--THE LAST GOVERNMENT'S HEAVY-HANDED ATTEMPTS AT POLITICAL
MANIPULATION WERE SEEN IN SHARP RELIEF. THE WIDESPREAD
REPUDIATION OF SUCH TACTICS WILL ACT AS A STRONG DETERRENT
AGAINST THEIR RECURRENCE IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

9. LOOKING AHEAD. IT IS AGAINST THIS BACKDROP THAT POLITICAL EVENTS IN THE COMING MONTHS WILL UNFOLD. THE LEFT, AS REPRESENTED BY HERNAN SILES, HAS EMERGED AS RELATIVELY STRENGTHENED, WHILE THE MORE CENTRIST PARTIES AND COALITIONS ARE DIVIDED AND GENERALLY WEAK. NONETHELESS, THE CENTER IS WHERE THE MAJORITY OF BOLIVIANS FEEL MOST COMFORTABLE. THE KEY QUESTION IS WHETHER A COHESIVE GROUP, PERHAPS HEADED BY A FRESH POLITICAL PERSONALITY, CAN BE PULLED TOGETHER TO REPRESENT THIS MAJORITY.
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